DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 663 CG 028 429

AUTHOR	Frydenberg, Erica; Lewis, Ramon
TITLE	Coping with Family Concerns in Adolescence: Does Family Status or Gender Make a Difference?
PUB DATE	1998-03-00
NOTE	19p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Erica Frydenberg, Dept. of Educational Psychology and Special Education, Univ. of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, Australia 3052.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Coping; Counseling; Early Adolescents; Family Life; *Family Status; Family Structure; Foreign Countries; Junior High Schools; *Parent Child Relationship; Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

Coping strategies utilized by adolescents in intact and separated families were studied. Students 11-14 years old in Year 7 (N=239) completed both the general and specific forms of the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS), an instrument developed in Australia for determining what strategies young people use to manage their concerns. Students completed both forms of the questionnaire, and the ACS twice. The first time they responded regarding their concerns in general and the second time they indicated how they coped with separation of their parents or family issues in their intact families. With regard to adolescents' general coping responses, results indicate that family status per se is not an important factor; but when it comes to the specific concern with family issues, the nature of the concern needs to be taken into account. Children whose parents have separated modified their general coping patterns to deal with the separation of their parents. Gender differences in coping patterns are also reported. Consequently, those working with young people in an attempt to facilitate their coping may need to take account of both the nature of the concern and the gender of the client, rather than just the status of the family. (Author/EMK)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 421 663

Coping with family concerns in adolescence: Does family status or gender make a difference?

Dr Erica Frydenberg
University of Melbourne

Dr Ramon Lewis
La Trobe University

Australia

Correspondence and request for reprints should be addressed to:
Dr Erica Frydenberg
Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education
University of Melbourne
Parkville
Victoria 3052 AUSTRALIA
Fax 61 3 9349 1915
Telephone 61 3 9344 6315

Word Count: 3698
Clinical, Counselling, Educational and Developmental
Running Head: COPING WITH FAMILY CONCERNS

CG028429

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. FRYDENBERG
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Abstract

This paper reports on the coping strategies utilised by adolescents in intact and separated families, using both the general and the specific form of the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS), an instrument developed in Australia to determine what strategies young people use to manage their concerns.

It was concluded that the general coping patterns of respondents was not related to family status although it was related to the sex of the respondent in that girls were more likely to use social support, self-blame and tension reducing activities such as drinking and smoking. When an examination was made of the extent to which young people vary their coping patterns to deal with specific family issues, the amount and type of variation in coping was systematically associated with family type but not with the sex of the respondent. In intact families, young people cope with family related issues in a manner similar to the way in which they cope with their general concerns. In contrast, children whose parents have separated, modified more noticeably their general coping patterns to deal with the separation of their parents, using less reference to others.

The results indicate that with regard to adolescents' general coping responses family status per se is not an important factor but when it comes to the specific concern with family issues the nature of the concern needs to be taken into account. Consequently those working with young people in an attempt to facilitate their coping may need to take account of both the the nature of the concern and gender of the client rather than just the status of the family.

Coping with family concerns in adolescence: Does family status or gender make a difference?

Children experience a number of major stresses in their lives, the greatest of which is loss of parent, by death or separation (Elkind, 1988). In Australia, it has been forecast that within a 20 year period, 30% of marriages will end in divorce (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1995). Adolescents show marked individual differences when coping with their parents' separation (Hetherington, 1989; Montemayor, 1984). Whilst some show resilience (Emery, 1988, Hetherington, 1989), others show developmental delays. Long term effects appear to relate more to the child's developmental status, gender and temperament, qualities of the home and parenting environment, and the resources and support systems available to the child rather than to aspects of the divorce or separation per se (Farber, Primavera, & Felner, 1983; Lee, Burkam, Zimiles, & Ladewski, 1994). Nevertheless there is emerging evidence that once the initial disruption has passed the adaptation depends on how parents relate to each other and what relationships occur, such as whether parents remarry (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996).

The data relating to the impact of divorce on educational outcomes is equivocal. For example, Marsh (1990) reported that psychoeducational outcomes during the last two years of high school are relatively unrelated to different family configurations such as two-parent, step parent and single-parent families. When one controls for a series of variables potentially related to family status, such as self esteem, educational aspiration, absenteeism, academic achievement, and so forth, family status explains less than one percent of the variance in American senior high and college students academic performance (Marsh, 1990). Similarly Kurdek and Siesky (1980) found that self-reported adjustment of young adolescents in two-parent nuclear, stepfather and mother-custody families was unrelated to family structure, gender and grade or any interaction amongst these variables.

In contrast, in a 1988 National Health Interview Survey of Child Health, Zill and Schoenborn (1991) found that in a sample of 17,000 young people in the United States one in five have had a developmental, learning or emotional problem. In reporting these data the authors note that such problems are twice as likely for children in disrupted families as for those in

intact, two-parent families. The study found that while developmental delays did not vary significantly by gender, learning difficulties were almost twice as common among males as among females. The frequency of emotional or behavioural problems amongst males exceeded that amongst females by 36%. Males predominated amongst youth exhibiting aggressive or hyperactive conduct, but females predominated for problems such as depression and anxiety. These findings are supported by another survey (Farber, Felner, & Primavera, 1985) which found that youngsters from single-parent families and families with step-parents were two to three times more likely to have had emotional problems than those living with both biological parents. Further, Rosenthal and Hanson (1980) found that children from two-parent households had significantly higher grades and higher occupational aspirations. In summarising Australian studies relating to the impact of parental divorce, Rodgers (1996) concluded that young people in separated families are at greater risk for a range of social and psychological problems including poor academic achievement, increased substance use and abuse, and emotional and delinquency problems

Notwithstanding the evidence of the impact of divorce on young people's lives and the different ways in which boys and girls cope in such circumstances, it is important to keep these findings in perspective. Specifically Emery (1988) points out that:

> In considering how children cope with divorce, the difficulties typically involved in adaptation should not be minimised, whilst the frequency with which family transition leads to abnormal outcomes must not be overstated . . . divorce has become a very common event. . . . To suggest its impact on children is inevitably pathological is an injustice to a large number of families. To suggest that divorce is an insignificant transition reveals insensitivity (p. 11).

Whilst divorce does not invariably have negative effects (Emery, 1988; Hauser & Bowlds, 1990), generally boys are reported as having more problems with the divorce of their parents than are girls (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen, & Anderson, 1989). There is support for the view that adjustment is positively related to social support from friends ( ). In summary, it can be argued that how young people cope with divorce and

separation of parents has implications for their psycho-educational adjustment and well-being.

In intact families where there is conflict, conflict in the family has been reported as the third major stressor for young people after death of a parent and divorce (Elkind, 1988). Furthermore, where there is a build-up of family stresses there is a greater likelihood of smoking, drinking and drug-related behaviours among young people (McCubbin, Needle, & Wilson, 1985). It is for this reason that family related stress as well as separation, where it exists, is the focus of the investigation.

In considering the measurement of adolescent coping there is widespread support for the notion that there are gender differences in coping behaviour, especially in the area of seeking social support (Cauce, Felner, & Primavera, 1982). It has been consistently reported that females utilise more social support than do males (Frydenberg & Lewis 1990, 1993a).

Social support has been broadly defined as a range of significant interpersonal relationships that have an impact on the individual's functioning (Caplan, 1974). Hirsch (1985) notes that social support encompasses those people who are the "presently significant" and who are either members of one's social network (family or friends) or non mental health professionals (e.g., physicians, clergy). The use of social support is reported to be relatively unaffected by the problem content per se since it has little effect on choice of social support, but is rather affected by resources based on strong ties (that is, those which satisfy expressive needs) and weak ties (those which satisfy instrumental needs) (Tausig & Michello, 1988). Although females are more likely to turn to social (human) support than are males, females experience more life stress and poorer emotional and physical well-being (Gad & Johnson, 1980). Furthermore, females use more Wishful Thinking and Tension Reduction than do males. However males report using more Physical Recreation than do females (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993a).

Irion, Coon and Blanchard-Fields (1988), when investigating the coping behaviour of young adolescents, used the Ways of Coping Checklist (WOC, Folkman & Lazarus, 1988) to examine how young people deal with a problem which they described as stressful. They found that males and females in separated families are more alike in their coping than they are in intact families.

Although the divorce experience is relatively common, it remains undetermined whether gender, family status, or both, influence coping. We therefore set out to examine this question by assessing the coping strategies used by groups of adolescents to cope with both their general concerns and their family issues. This was done for youth in both intact and separated families. In the former they considered the stresses within the family and in the latter the family issue considered was the separation of parents.

A major difficulty in comparing the way children in intact families cope with family issues and the way children from separated families cope with the separation of their parents is that any differences in coping strategies could be due to not only the nature of the concern, but could readily be due to sampling vagaries. To ameliorate this problem, the methodology adopted was one which first compared the way children in both types of families coped with their general concerns and then compared the extent to which they modified their general coping patterns to deal with their family issue, be it the separation of their parents or intact family concerns.

Coping is defined as a set of cognitive and affective actions which arise in response to a particular concern. These actions represent an attempt to restore the equilibrium or remove the turbulence for the individual. This may be done by solving the problem (that is, removing the stimulus) or accommodating to the concern without bringing about a solution (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993a). Coping is essentially a dynamic phenomenon. Although adolescents have an underlying pattern of coping responses that is utilised for all concerns, their use of particular coping strategies is systematically associated with the nature of the concern (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1994). This type of conceptualisation is not unlike a state–trait approach which focuses on the transitory or variable nature of coping behaviour (state) and the relatively stable individual differences in coping behaviour (trait). It appears that a dual approach to conceptualising coping is required to accommodate both an individual's consistency in coping across a range of life issues and the variation which is specific to such issues. Although the exact nature of this relationship has not yet been determined it has been adopted in both the adolescent and adult arena (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1996; Parker & Endler, 1992; Hobfoll, Cameron, Chapman, & Gallagher, 1996).

For the purposes of our investigation, adolescent coping was measured by an 80-item scale called the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS). Before detailing the nature of the study undertaken, some background to the ACS is provided to evidence its suitability.

Development of the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS)

In brief, the development of the ACS commenced with the gathering of "open data" and continued with a series of studies, the results of which shaped the form of the 80-item questionnaire (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1990, 1991, 1993b). In developing such an instrument the range of coping strategies most commonly used by adolescents was captured. Each of the 18 coping strategies, that is each scale, reflects a conceptually and empirically distinct coping strategy.

To provide an overview of the ACS, the 18 coping strategies it measures are listed below, together with a brief description of each conceptual area covered by the strategy, and an exemplar of a coping action indicative of the area.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The development of the ACS has involved a number of stages over a five year period. Initially, 643 respondents aged 15 to 18 generated some 2041 descriptions of how they coped with their major concern. These statements were reduced to the 80 items on the ACS, with each of the 18 scales reflecting a different coping strategy; each containing between 3 and 5 items. Apart from the last item, which asks student to write down any things they do to cope other than those things described in the preceding 79 items, each item describes a specific response related to coping. Respondents indicate if the coping activity described is used "a great deal", "often", "sometimes", "very little" or "doesn't apply or don't do it", by circling the numbers 5, 4, 3, 2, or 1 respectively. The statistical properties of these scales and the details of the five investigations supporting their development are reported in the ACS manual (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993b).

All scales are reliable with a median Cronbach alpha indicator .70. The stability of responses as measured by test retest reliability coefficients also averages .70. Although a number of coefficients are moderate they are nevertheless satisfactory given the dynamic nature of coping as indicated in our earlier definition of this construct (Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993b).

Method

To obtain data about young people's coping behaviour, the ACS was administered to 239 students in Year 7. Since the main focus of the study was family status, early adolescence was an optimum age for the sample. It is a time of relatively low conflict and later, adolescent and career concerns may dominate. Each of the students who was sampled completed the ACS twice during the same testing occasion. The first time they responded regarding their concerns in general and the second, they indicated how they coped with either the separation of their parents, or family issues in their intact families. Given the evidence in the literature that young people's concerns relating to separation, where they exist, dominate (Elkind, 1988), the family issue that was to be the focus for children in separated families was the separation of their parents and for children in intact families it was the main concern in the family.

Sample description

The age of the 239 students, sampled from seven secondary schools in metropolitan Melbourne, ranged from 11 to 14 years and had a mean of 12.1 years. In total, 36 students were living in single parent households. Of the 203 students in intact families, 84 were female and 119 were male; of the 36 students in separated famlies, 22 were male and 14 were female.

There were three main questions that we sought to address in this study. They are the following:

1) Do adolescents in intact and separated families use different strategies to deal with their general concerns?

2) Do adolescents in intact families vary the way they cope with their general concerns to cope with concerns relating to family issues?

3) Do adolescents in separated families vary the way they cope with their general concerns to cope with concerns relating to the separation of their parents?

With regard to each of these questions gender differences were examined.

Results

In order to investigate the first of the above questions, the amount of each coping strategy boys and girls in intact families used to cope with their general concerns was compared to the corresponding usage by children in separated families. The analysis undertaken to examine this relationship was a two-way MANOVA which considered the effects of gender and family type (intact or separated) on students' overall responses to the 18 coping scales. Because there was no significant interaction effect for gender and family type on coping pattern, F (1,327) = .57, p=.92, it was possible to focus on the separate multivariate Fs for the two main effects of family type and gender. The effect of family type was not significant, $F(1,327) = 1.24$, $p = .24$, indicating that there was no association between the pattern of children's general coping responses and family status. In contrast, the multivariate F for gender was statistically significant, $F(1,327) = 2.93$, $p < .001$. As a consequence, the univariate Fs for separate coping scales were inspected to determine what coping strategies were utilised to differing extents by boys and girls.

The coping strategies which showed statistically significant differences in utilization between boys and girls irrespective of family type, were, Seeking Social Support (male $M = 2.74$, female $M = 3.00$; $F(1,237) = 4.53$, $p < .05$), Self-blame (male $M = 2.54$, female $M = 2.73$; $F(1,237) = 4.29$, $p < .05$), Tension Reduction (male $M = 1.85$, female $M = 2.08$; $F(1,237) = 14.91$, $p < .001$) and Ignore, (male $M = 2.40$, female $M = 2.06$; $F(1,237) = 4.57$, $p < .05$). As can be seen, girls used more of the three first named strategies and less of the last strategy than did the boys.

To investigate the extent to which young adolescents in intact and separated families vary their general styles of coping to deal with family issues, the focus of Questions 2 and 3, their coping responses were subjected to one-way repeated measures ANOVA's which effectively compared the differences between the use of respective coping scales for general and family concerns. Since the 18 scales were considered separately for this

analysis, 18 one-way repeated measures ANOVA's were computed for each family type. Because of the multiple significance tests conducted on the same data sets, an alpha level of .01 was utilised for these analyses. The left hand side of Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations and relevant univariate F values for intact families. The equivalent results for respondents in separated families are reported on the right hand side.

Insert Table 1 about here

The data in the left hand side of Table 1 indicate that in intact families there is evidence of greater worrying about family concerns than there is for general concerns, $F(1,201) = 12.38$, $p<.001$. The only other significant difference is a decrease in the usage of Relaxation for family related issues, compared to its usage for general concerns, $F(1,201) = 6.21$, $p<.01$. The data in the right hand side of Table 1 applies to separated families and indicates how adolescents in these families vary their general coping behaviour in order to cope with the separation of their parents. There are two statistically significant variations. Specifically, there is decreased usage of Seeking Social Support, $F(1,34) = 13.40$, $p< .001$, and Seeking to Belong, $F(1,34) =12.09$, $p<.01$, for issues of separation than there is for general concerns. In summary, for both types of family situations there is a significant variation between general coping and coping with family concerns or separation of their parents. Young people in separated families are less likely to involve others as an aid to coping with separation than when coping with their general concerns. In intact families there is more worry and less relaxing associated with family concerns than with concerns in general.

Further analyses were conducted to investigate whether gender influenced the way in which adolescents in different types of families (intact and separated) varied their general coping strategies to deal with family issues. To investigate this effect, two sets of 18 one way repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted (one set for each family type). In these analyses, variation of each respective coping strategy was used as a criterion measure and gender was the independent measure. Once again, because of the multiple tests being conducted (a total of 36 for each family type), a probability level of .01 was set for statistical significance. No significant

gender differences were found, which indicates that the patterns of findings reported above do not differ for boys and girls.

Discussion

Given the complexity of what we are trying to measure, and the large amount of error of measurement associated with attempts to capture complex constructs with simple scales, when one looks at indicators of reliability, beit stability or internal consistency, there are many cases that are moderate rather than clearly convincing. Therefore, given the nature of what is being measured, it is not surprising that many relationships between variables, which are sufficiently substantial to reoccur in studies done five years apart on different constructs (for example, girls use more social support than do boys, Frydenberg & Lewis, 1997) are small. It would be foolhardy to dismiss these as an artefact of chance, simply because the magnitude of the associations, although statistically significant, are very small. Consequently the discussion that follows will treat the findings as substantive, despite reservations held about the significance of any particular finding. The findings all add to the tapestry, so that ultimately a clear picture emerges, through replication, in a bid to clarify the questions under consideration.

Whilst young people manage their general concerns in much the same way in families that are intact or separated there is an indication that family issues are of considerable concern to young people in both types of families.

In intact families, students reported greater use of Worry and less usage of Seeking Relaxing Diversions to manage family concerns. This may indicate that these are difficult concerns for them to manage. Indeed, conflict in the family has been found to be the third major stressor for young people after death of a parent and divorce (Elkind, 1988).

If we accept the assumption that separation of parents is stressful to young people, the fact that, in separated families there is relatively less use of Social Support and Seeking to Belong to deal with this issue than there is to deal with general concerns would indicate that young people are not calling on their full range of resources to manage the concerns relating to the separation of their parents. In particular, they appear to refrain from using the help of others. It is important to emphasise that these coping strategies are already in the repertoire of these adolescents as evidenced by their usage of them to deal with general concerns.

Young people whose parents are separated are less likely to seek the assistance of others to deal with this issue than they are to deal with their general concerns. This finding may signal the fact that these sorts of concerns are not easily shared by young people. Further, they may not regard others as helpful in dealing with separation matters even though they indicate that often they do not have the resources to cope. Alternatively, this finding may be indicative of the fact that resources are either not available or not perceived as being accessible. This may be a statement of resignation. On a more positive note, the data may be interpreted as showing that young people are more self-sufficient in managing their parents' separation than in dealing with their general concerns. However, this would seem unlikely, given that the literature to date reports a higher incidence of emotional and learning difficulties in the population of young people who have experienced separation of their parents.

Conclusion

The overall picture is one where young people, regardless of family status, appear to manage their general concerns in much the same way. There is evidence however of gender differences. When it comes to coping with family concerns, in intact families, or separation in separated families there are differences in the usage of strategies of coping with concerns in general and the specific separation or family concerns. These findings would support to some extent maintaining a distinction between coping with specific concerns and more general coping styles and is consistent with the state-trait conceptualisation. Thus when working with young people in clinical or counselling contexts it is relevant to be sensitive to both the nature of the concern being dealt with and the gender of the client. Care needs to be taken with general measures of coping behaviour as these may not be valid indicators of young people cope with specific situations such as stress in the family.

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (1995). Marriages and Divorces, Australia, 1995 (No. 3310.0). Canberra, Australian Capital Territory: Author.

Buchanan, C.M., Maccoby, E.E., & Dornbusch, Sanford, M. (1996). Adolescents After Divorce. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Caplan, G. (1974). Support systems and community mental health: Lectures on concept development. NewYork: Behavioural Publications.

Cauce, A.M., Felner, R.D., & Primavera, J. (1982). Social support in high-risk adolescents: Structural components and adaptive impact. American Journal of Community Psychology, 10 (4), 417-429.

Elkind, D (1988). The hurried child: Growing up too fast too soon. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Emery, R. (1988). Marriage, divorce and children's adjustment. California: Sage Publications.

Farber, S.S., Felner, R.D., & Primavera, J. (1985). Parental separation/divorce and adolescents: An examination of factors mediating adaptation. American Journal of Community Psychology, 13 (2), 171-185.

Farber, S.S., Primavera, J., & Felner, R.D. (1983). Older adolescents and parental divorce: Adjustment problems and mediators of coping. Journal of Divorce, 7, 59-75.

Folkman, S. & Lazarus, R.S. (1988). Ways of Coping Questionnaire Test Booklet. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (1990). How Adolescents cope with different concerns: The development of the Adolescent Coping Checklist (ACC). Psychological Test Bulletin, 3, 63-75.

Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (1991). Adolescent coping: The different ways in which boys and girls cope. Journal of Adolescence, 14, 119-133.

Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (1993a) Boys play sport and girls turn to others: Age, gender and ethnicity as determinants of coping. Journal of Adolescence. 16, 252-266.

Frydenberg, E., & Lewis, R. (1993b). Manual: The Adolescent Coping Scale. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Frydenberg, E. & Lewis, R. (1994). Coping with different concerns: Consistency and variation in coping strategies used by adolescents. Australian Psychologist, 29, 45-48.

Frydenberg, E. & Lewis, R. (1996). The Adolescent Coping Scale: Multiple forms and applications of a self report inventory in a counselling and

research context. European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 12 (3), 216-227.

Frydenberg, E. & Lewis, R. (1997). Coping with stresses and concerns during adolescence: A longitudinal study. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 407 647).

Gad, M. T., & Johnson, J. H. (1980). Correlates of adolescent life stress as related to race, SES, and levels of perceived social support. Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 13, 13-16.

Hauser, S. T., & Bowlds, M.K. (1990). Stress, coping and adaptation. In S. Feldman & G. Elliot (Eds.), At the threshold: The developing adolescent (pp. 384-413). Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Hetherington, E. M. (1989). Coping with family transitions: Winners, losers and survivors. Child Development, 60, 1-14.

Hetherington, E. M., Stanley-Hagen, M., & Anderson, E.R. (1989). Marital transitions: A child's perspective. American Psychologist, 44, 303-312.

Hirsch, B.J. (1985). Adolescent coping and support across multiple social environments. American Journal of Community Psychology, 13 (4), 381-392.

Hobfoll, D.R., Cameron, R.P., Chapman, H.A., & Gallagher, R.W. (1996). Social support and social coping in couples. In G. R. Pierce, B.R. Sarason, & I.G. Sarason (Eds.), Handbook of Social Support and the Family (pp. 413-433). New York: Plenum Press.

Irion, J.C., Coon, R.C., & Blanchard-Fields, F. (1988). The influence of divorce on coping in adolescence. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 17, 135-145.

Kurdek, L., & Siesky, A. (1980). Children's perceptions of their parents' divorce. Journal of Divorce, 3, 33-378.

Lee, V.E., Burkam, D.T., Zimiles, H., & Ladewski, B. (1994). Family structure and its effect on behavioural and emotional problems in young adolescents. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 4 (3), 405-437.

Marsh, H.W. (1990). Two-parent, stepparent, and single-parent families: Changes in achievement, attitudes, and behaviours during the last two years of high school. Journal of Educational Psychology, 82 (2), 372-340.

Montemayor, R. (1984). Picking up the pieces: The effects of parental divorce on adolescents with some suggestions for school-based intervention programs. Journal of Early Adolescence, 4, 289-314.

Parker, J.D. & Endler, N. (1992). Coping with coping assessment: A critical review. European Journal of Personality, 6, 321-344

McCubbin, H. I., Needle, R.H., & Wilson, M. (1985). Adolescent health risk behaviours: Family stress and adolescent coping. Family Relations, 34, 51-62.

Rodgers, B. (1996). Social and psychological wellbeing of children from divorced families: Australian research findings. Australian Psychologist, 31, 174-182.

Rosenthal, D., & Hansen, J. (1980). Comparison of adolescents' perceptions and behaviours in two parent families. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 9, 407-417.

Tausig, M., & Michello, J. (1988) Seeking social support. Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 9, 1-12.

Zill, N., & Schoenborn, C. (1991). 1988 National health interview survey of child health. APA Monitor, 22 (2).

Figure 1:
The conceptual areas of coping

1) SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT is represented by items which indicate an inclination to share the problem with others and enlist support in its management (e.g., Talk to other people to help me sort it out).

2) FOCUS ON SOLVING THE PROBLEM is a problem-focused strategy which tackles the problem systematically by learning about it and takes into account different points of view or options (e.g., Work at solving the problem to the best of my ability).

3) WORK HARD AND ACHIEVE is a factor describing commitment, ambition and industry (e.g., Work hard).

4) WORRY is characterised by items which indicate a concern about the future in general terms or more specifically concern with happiness in the future (e.g., Worry about what is happening).

5) INVESTING IN CLOSE FRIENDS is about engaging in a particular intimate relationship (e.g., Spend more time with boy/girl friend).

6) SEEK TO BELONG indicates a caring and concern for one's relationship with others in general and more specifically concern with what others think (e.g., Improve my relationship with others).

7) WISHFUL THINKING characterised by items which are based on hope and anticipation of a positive outcome (e.g., Hope for the best).

8) SOCIAL ACTION is about letting others know what is of concern and enlisting support by writing petitions or organising an activity such as a meeting or a rally (e.g., Join with people who have the same concern).

9) TENSION REDUCTION is characterised by items which reflect an attempt to make oneself feel better by releasing tension (e.g., Make myself feel better by taking alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs).

10) NOT COPING consists of items which reflect the individual's inability to deal with the problem and the development of psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., I have no way of dealing with the situation).

11) IGNORE THE PROBLEM is characterised by items which reflect a conscious blocking out of the problem (e.g., Ignore the problem).

12) SELF BLAME indicates that an individual sees themselves as responsible for the concern or worry (e.g. Accept that I am responsible for the problem).

13) KEEP TO SELF is characterised by items which reflect the individual's withdrawal from others and wish to keep others from knowing about concerns (e.g., Keep my feelings to my self).

14) SEEK SPIRITUAL SUPPORT is characterised by items which reflect prayer and belief in the assistance of a spiritual leader or Lord (e.g., Pray for help and guidance so that everything will be all right).

15) FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE is represented by items which indicate a positive and cheerful outlook on the current situation. This includes seeing the 'bright side' of circumstances and seeing oneself as fortunate (e.g., Look on the bright side of things and think of all that is good).

16) SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP denotes the use of a professional adviser, such as a teacher or counsellor (e.g., Discuss the problem with qualified people).

17) SEEK RELAXING DIVERSIONS is about relaxation in general rather than about sport. It is characterised by items which describe leisure activities such as reading and painting (e.g., Find a way to relax, for example, listen to music, read a book, play a musical instrument, watch TV).

18) PHYSICAL RECREATION is characterised by items which relate to playing sport and keeping fit (e.g., Keep fit and healthy).

Table 1

Extent of variation in strategies used to manage general concerns and family concerns in intact families and general and separation concerns in separated families

(Repeated measures MANOVA)

	Intact (n = 203)						Separated (n = 36)					
	General		Family		Signif.		General		Separation		Signif.	
	X	SD	X	SD	F		X	SD	X	SD	F	
Social Support	2.83	0.92	2.83	0.95	0.00		2.87	0.89	2.41	0.91	13.40	***
Focus on												
Solving the Problem	3.25	0.74	3.31	0.78	1.41		3.14	0.61	2.92	0.76	3.63	
Work Hard and Achieve	3.78	0.64	3.81	0.65	0.58		3.63	0.52	3.56	0.59	0.48	
Worry	2.85	0.86	3.02	0.94	12.38	***	2.61	0.80	2.65	0.92	0.74	
Invest in Close Friends	2.93	0.93	2.89	0.91	0.71		2.94	1.00	2.83	1.18	2.04	
Seek to Belong	2.98	0.77	2.95	0.81	0.61		3.12	0.82	2.84	0.81	12.09	**
Wishful Thinking	3.15	0.82	3.16	0.87	0.00		2.86	0.76	2.80	0.78	0.26	
Not Coping	1.97	0.61	2.05	0.66	4.97		2.07	0.79	2.02	0.57	0.31	
Tension Reduction	1.93	0.60	1.99	0.68	3.35		2.01	0.72	2.04	0.82	0.04	
Social Action	1.67	0.68	1.66	0.67	0.19		1.71	0.65	1.71	0.76	0.01	
Ignore the Problem	2.30	0.75	2.31	0.78	0.00		2.06	0.63	2.11	0.72	0.26	
Self Blame	2.65	0.85	2.64	0.96	0.02		2.46	1.01	2.45	0.84	0.00	
Keep to Self	2.76	0.82	2.79	0.83	0.31		2.51	0.87	2.49	0.90	0.02	
Seek Spiritual Support	2.08	1.08	2.11	1.16	0.72		1.76	1.03	1.66	0.95	1.17	
Focus on the Positive	3.13	0.73	3.16	0.76	0.45		2.95	0.64	2.86	0.74	0.72	
Seek Professional Help	1.60	0.75	1.57	0.86	0.60		1.54	0.57	1.33	0.53	5.72	
Seek Relaxing Diversions	3.87	0.75	3.76	0.81	6.21	**	3.95	0.71	3.80	0.91	1.45	
Physical Recreation	3.31	0.87	3.25	0.89	2.96		3.22	0.72	3.14	0.87	0.76	

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

tables word.doc mundee